

ARCHÉOME

Humankind is the storytelling species. Constantly reminding us of who we are, narrative lore is at the core of every culture, from the simplest and oldest oral traditions of the aboriginal peoples of earth to the terse amalgam of lyric, urban myth and screenplay that help define the latest generation X, Y or Z. As the capping accomplishment of human scientific endeavor in the 20th century, an armada of international biological laboratories have recently provided us with the most stunning technical achievement in the history of mankind: The Genome. Comprising the complete collection of human DNA, painstakingly arranged in the proper sequence, the Genome contains the story of how sperm and egg combine to create a single cell destined to become a human being, the subplots of different tissues and their development into the mechanisms of our bodies, sinister tales of genes gone awry to create disease and suffering and the magical combinations that enable genius and talent.

The Genome, compared between people, among peoples, offers the promise of reconstructing the tree of the human family, informing the ancient tales of Fall and Diaspora with an objective metric. Thus, Eve is now known to be our all Mother, issuing from her African Eden all we children. In Europe, a tale of ten strong men is revealed in a set of chromosomes, the Y's, that have been passed from father to son without change, over time so deep we have no words to feel it with. The story of humankind is written on the genes, in their sameness's, their differences, their geographical distributions, tracking the progress of our fathers and mothers through space, through time. This is not, however, the story of humanity. Like paper, a tabula rasa incipient with history, the genome is simply the story of human potential, human capabilities. The high degree of genetic variation in Africa, compared with the restricted range of allelic variation on the other continents, gives evidence of a small group of people who wandered far from home to populate the planet earth with large brained apes. Fixation of a certain set of mutations, a particular constellation of alleles, in the valley between Tigris and Euphrates, speaks of the compelling lure of plentitude proffered by the invention of agriculture, just before the dawn of civilization. The true human narrative, however, is written in the actions and interactions of individual human lives. Of these, we have little knowledge beyond 25 centuries and almost nothing past 50; just a small trickle of oral tradition and written narrative that has survived into this time. The human story, however, extends at least 1,000 centuries before the present and, evolutionarily, probably spans as much as 5,000 centuries to the ancestor that first exhibited human behaviors. There is only one way to interrogate the past at these depths. This is through the combined disciplines of archeology and anthropology. Who of us has not

experienced awe at the sight of a prehistoric campground, littered with bits of bone, rude tools comprising simple broken rocks and the shallow graves of ancients?

Painstakingly excavated by dedicated men and women, using tiny tools, brushes vanishingly small, and hard won knowledge and experience to remove the dust of scores of millennia from these primitive human homesteads. How can we not wonder at the economies of Mesopotamia, revealed in scratches made in clay envelopes laden with bills of sale that have somehow lain, awaiting understanding, in the sands of the Middle East. The discovery of Troy by Schliemann after years of lonely toil, charged Homer's rhapsodic tales with an immediacy felt across a chasm 100 generations wide. Recovering the Monitor and the Merrimack from their watery graves in the James River and Charleston Harbor rekindled a virtual memory of the great fraternal struggle of the United States. The slow recovery and accrual of the evidence of human experience, the treasures and detritus of individual lives, provides the only tangible strands that can be woven into a coherent tapestry that tells the story of humanity. And so, the Archeome project. Like the Genome project, representing the totality of human genetic information, the Archeome project will recover the totality of human artifact and evidence that contains all that can be told of humanity's life on earth, from the savannahs of our birthplace to the gleaming towers that dot our 21st century cities. Using the models derived from over a century of systematic excavation and analysis and developing new technologies to promote this most significant effort ever undertaken by humanity, the Archeome project will examine every square meter of the earth to identify all extant human artifacts. Coupled with advanced population genomics and the totality of written history, the Archeome project will reconstruct the true narrative that comprises human history, the true Story of Humanity. From the first broken stone to the first electron microscope, the first purposeful image to a complete inventory of the world wide web, the Archeome project will document the evolution of human creativity and thought as it emerged from our animal ancestors and passes into our genetically enhanced offspring. The story of humanity contains the answer to the question, why are we here. The answer will be provided by an inventory, first 5 then 50 meters deep, of human artifact from the entire surface of the planet Earth. Focus groups, technology development, world governmental oversight, data analysis to plan the draft Archeome which will cover 2% of the exposed land surface of earth to a depth of 3-10 meters...

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Imagine a text like this arriving in one's e-mail box; so it was my brother addressed such a document to me in March of 2001...